

# SOCIAL

# ACT-ION

## VOICES OF OUR DAY

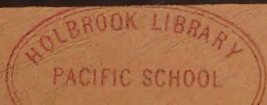
by

AMOS N. WILDER

•

15c

May 15, 1941



# SOCIAL ACTION

(A MAGAZINE OF FACT)

Published by the Council for Social Action of the  
Congregational Christian Churches

289 Fourth Avenue

New York City

May 15, 1941

ALFRED W. SWAN, *Chairman*

DWIGHT J. BRADLEY, *Executive Director*

ELIZABETH G. WHITING, *Associate Director and Editor*

---

## CONTENTS

VOICES OF OUR DAY, <i>by Amos N. Wilder</i> . . . . .	3
Poetry and Crisis . . . . .	3
Hurts and Costs . . . . .	7
Diagnosis . . . . .	13
The Way Forward . . . . .	18
The Christian Affirmation . . . . .	25
ULTIMATUM EXPIRES MIDNIGHT, <i>by M. Farrow</i> . . . . .	31
LEST WE FORGET . . . . .	40

---

Amos N. Wilder is professor of New Testament Interpretation at Andover Newton Theological School, and author of *The Spiritual Aspects of the New Poetry*, published in 1940 by Harper and Bros.

---

**SOCIAL ACTION**, Volume VII, Number 5, May 15, 1941. Published monthly except July and August. Subscription \$1.00 per year; Canada, \$1.20 per year. Single copies, 15c. each; 2 to 9 copies, 10c. each; 10 to 49 copies, 7c. each; 50 or more copies, 5c. each. Re-entered as second-class matter January 30, 1939, at the Post Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

---

Have you sent in your renewal to **SOCIAL ACTION**? You will find the expiration date of your subscription on the envelope in which your magazine is enclosed. . . . Please remember to give us two weeks notice of any change of address.

# VOICES OF OUR DAY

*Social Issues in Contemporary Poetry*

By AMOS N. WILDER

## *Poetry and Crisis*

We are all anxious to understand the strange times in which we live. Without consenting to fear and panic we nevertheless recognize that the present is full of tragedy and that the future is ominous. The English poet MacNeice wrote of impending crisis from the vantage point of England in the fall of 1938:

The night grows purple, the crisis hangs  
Over the roofs like a Persian army.<sup>1</sup>

The events did not prove him an alarmist. For the American scene, if we care to isolate it, such terms may seem excessive. But at least the words of W. H. Auden suit us too:

behind the doors of this ambitious day  
Stand shadows with enormous grudges.<sup>2</sup>

We all wish to understand better the deeper forces of our time. In particular we want to anticipate as far as possible what the future is preparing for us. Who will diagnose our condition? Are the events taking place in Europe due to particular conditions over there? Are we perhaps only confronting a passing thunder storm in our western world, and may we expect to see the skies brighten suddenly after a short time, and our customary world-outline reappear? How tenacious are our best traditions of faith, character and sacrifice? In other words, what elements of soundness and social health may we bank on when danger threatens?

The answers to these kinds of questions must come for a large

1. *Autumn Journal*, New York, Random, 1939, p. 35. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

2. "Autumn 1940," *The Nation*, December 7, 1940. *The Double Man*, New York, Random, 1941. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc., and *The Nation*.



part from the more realistic sciences. But ultimately the answers depend on more delicate and more profound diagnosis than is possible for economics and political science. Fortunate we are if we do not have to confess the bewilderment of the seventy-fourth Psalm:

We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet:  
Neither is there among us any that knoweth how long . . .  
For the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations  
of cruelty.

Yet even though the future be obscure, the prophet, the seer and the poet can best testify as to the character of the spiritual loyalties and disaffections of men and what these portend. The prophets of Israel have been called the "stormy petrels" of their generations because they anticipated and heralded the storm. And the prophets better than any knew "the way the world was going," to use the phrase of Matthew Arnold. The poets of our modern world have no such august impulse as the Hebrew prophets, but they may well throw light on their own day, according as they are sensitive and according as they are actually close to the hearts and lives of their contemporaries. The poets may also render another service: not only are they diviners and prognosticators but they may on occasion furnish the rallying cries for the causes that command the future.

We should not exaggerate the influence of the poets today. They are not widely read. Many are difficult. Even those that have a following speak for particular groups only. This is true even of the more traditional poets. It is a mistake to think that the traditional poets speak for the majority. Their audience also is a particular one and a shrinking one. Yet though the poets are not widely read today, they do testify to underlying moods and forces. And they offer us an opportunity to pass beyond the insulated and sound-proof chambers of our own stations in life.

We shall give attention here mainly to the verse of the last few years that has concerned itself with social and ethical topics,

or verse that in its personal expression has at the same time been revealing of the factors that are at work in modern society. It is a fact that modern poetry has given large place to social concerns, whether or not a given poet has adopted a particular social creed. Even those poets who have been mainly concerned with poetry as a personal expression and poetry as a craft have inevitably evoked the cultural strains and handicaps that affect their private struggle. Most of the poetry today in one way or another has a different accent from that of the pre-depression and pre-war period.

The truly modern man today has been subjected to particular kinds of stresses and his spiritual problems have changed. He has lived in a different world from that of the older generation and has had a different kind of spiritual growth. It follows that his arts and his poetry have been correspondingly modified. This holds even for those that have remained within our great religious traditions. But it should be borne in mind that we have evidence at many points of a widening breach between the modern spirit and the church and synagogue, even on the part of moderns concerned with values. One of the younger writers made the comment that the church in relation to our contemporary world suggested to him a man on a bicycle trying to catch up with a train.

If current poetry gives evidence of a new sensibility and new method, it gives even more significant evidence of a social background marked by conflict and meagre spiritual sustenance. This will appear below, but a brief summary may be made here by way of orientation. The nature of our social arrangements has aroused pungent and often withering satire and attack. It is insisted that these arrangements occasion ominous antagonisms; that they have led to a crass and frivolous luxury on the one hand, and to acute insecurity and disaffection on the other. Large groups of our population have lost their roots and drifted into an existence both precarious in its economic aspect, and what is more important, undernourished in all that concerns the



heart and the soul. This does not hold for the underprivileged alone, but also for urban multitudes that are fairly well off. In both cases those roots and connections which are so essential for full personal life and health are sundered.

The essential role of the family in the protection and nourishment of the individual is made impossible in wide strata of society today. The life of the family is lived "under the feet of the economic system." It becomes an area of "private chaos" with consequences of distortion and instability. But this is only one aspect of the absence of social rootage for multitudes today. In older ages and in more primitive societies men had the protection of the "neighborhood" in some form. Today this is less and less true. As a result of these and like factors life becomes highly artificial. The normal channels of spiritual nourishment—nature, home, neighborhood, church and fatherland—are unable to fulfil their roles, and men and women are unable to meet the demands of life as isolated individuals. Thus we get the large increase in neurosis, in instability, in crime. Losing the scope for full personal functioning, men become "cowed cyphers" in a formidable world of prodigious forces beyond their control, or they become suggestible masses at the mercy of hysteria and the voice in the little black box of the radio. That such multitudes are exposed to the debauching effects of our current "kitsch" or moronic literature and amusement goes without saying.

To walk the streets of some of our cities today and to note the numbers of individuals afflicted with various nervous tics and mannerisms or the signs of vice or desperation is to give one the impression of walking in the corridors of a psychopathic hospital.

Some of our artists display the marks of these kinds of malformation. The alleged unintelligibility of some modern poets is related to it. The unintended evidence these give of social disorder reinforces the deliberate criticism of society by others of more stable temperament.

*Hurts and Costs*

I cannot hold my peace;  
Because thou hast heard, O my soul,  
The sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.  
Destruction upon destruction is cried;  
For the whole land is laid waste . . .  
How long shall I see the standard,  
And hear the sound of the trumpet?

Jer.4:19-21

Once it was wont to make war with swords,  
now it is made by withholding, now here, now there,  
the bread the tender father bars from none.

Paradiso, xviii,127-9

Among the voices of our time as we find them in poetry are those that rise out of, or testify to, the hurts and costs, the areas of especial distress and anguish in our common life. It is well to attend to these before we turn to other themes. We are reminded here first of those who bear the more obvious costs of social disorder and war: the insecure, the impoverished, the unemployed, the migrant, the evicted, the refugee and the outcaste. Carl Sandburg has well expressed the anomalies that result from our social disorder in *The People, Yes*:

"I came to a country,"  
said a wind-bitten vagabond,  
"where I saw shoemakers barefoot  
saying they had made too many shoes.  
I met carpenters living outdoors  
saying they had built too many houses.  
Clothing workers I talked with,  
bushelmen and armhole-basters,  
said their coats were on a ragged edge  
because they made too many coats.  
And I talked with farmers, yeomanry,  
the backbone of the country,  
so they were told,  
saying they were in debt and near starvation

because they had gone ahead like always  
 and raised too much wheat and corn  
 too many hogs, sheep, cattle.  
 When I said, 'You live in a strange country,'  
 they answered slow, like men  
 who wouldn't waste anything, not even language:  
 'You ain't far wrong there, young feller.  
 We're going to do something, we don't know what.' "

"I raise hogs and the railroads and the banks take them away from  
 me and I get hit in the hind end.  
 The more hogs I raise the worse my mortgages look,  
 I try to sleep and I hear those mortgages gnawing in the night  
 like rats in a corn crib.  
 I want to shoot somebody but I don't know who."<sup>1</sup>

The queries and poignancies concealed here under a grim humor appear more explicitly in the work of many of the poets. Kenneth Patchen in "Street Corner College" presents the acrid despair of the unemployed when they are young:

Next year the grave grass will cover us.  
 We stand now, and laugh;  
 Watching the girls go by;  
 Betting on slow horses; drinking cheap gin.  
 We have nothing to do; nowhere to go; nobody.

Last year was a year ago; nothing more.  
 We weren't younger then; nor older now.

We manage to have the look that young men have;  
 We feel nothing behind our faces, one way or other.

We shall probably not be quite dead when we die.  
 We were never anything all the way; not even soldiers.

We are the insulted, brother, the desolate boys.  
 Sleepwalkers in a dark and terrible land,  
 Where solitude is a dirty knife at our throats. . . .<sup>2</sup>

1. New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1936, pp. 73, 75. By permission.

2. *First Will and Testament*, Norfolk, Conn., New Directions, 1939, p. 41.



Patchen, who comes from a steel worker's home in Ohio, speaks for that element in the ranks of labor which rebels violently against the conditions of their life, and which has been driven to a radical temper and a class consciousness that can entertain little loyalty to our dominant institutions. One finds, however, in work like his many signs of ethical concern and social compassion. His recent work deals less with the class struggle and more with the ravages and horrors of a world involved in war. In this work there is no such hope for the future as appeared in Marxian form in his first book. It is disturbing that the resources of religious faith appear unavailable to youth of this type, either for personal reinforcement or for social action.

Miss Muriel Rukeyser brings vividly before us the forlorn hope of the unemployed in her often quoted, "Boy with His Hair Cut Short." The solicitous sister cuts the boy's hair and assures him with despair in her heart that he will now surely find work. In the same volume, *U.S.1*, in the lengthy section entitled, "The Book of the Dead," this poet has dramatized the fate of the victims of silicosis in the Gauley Tunnel tragedy in West Virginia a dozen years ago. The vivid personal details and ironic comment are so combined as to point the responsibilities which range far in our social order.

Another phase of the tormenting picture is that of rural life. For New England it is touched on in the work of Reuel Denney, *The Connecticut River*. The following phrases of MacLeish suggest much:

the neighborhood

Selling the farms: leaving the stock in the paddock:

Leaving the key in the lock and the cake on the table:

Letting the door slam: the tap drip<sup>3</sup>

As for the city, Auden's thought turns in "The Capital" to the misshapen lives that are its products, and the contamination that goes out from it to the country:

3. "Discovery of This Time," *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*, October 1940, p. 1. By permission of *Poetry* and of the author.

In unlighted streets you hide away the appalling;  
 Factories where lives are made for a temporary use  
 Like collars or chairs, rooms where the lonely are battered  
 Slowly like pebbles into fortuitous shapes.

But the sky you illumine, your glow is visible far  
 Into the dark countryside, the enormous, the frozen;  
 Where, hinting at the forbidden like a wicked uncle,  
 Night after night to the farmer's children you beckon.<sup>4</sup>

The fact of war and its costs is found throughout the writers of this type, in terms almost always of fascist war and total war. What obsesses the poet's imagination is the enormity of war on women and children, war by blockade, war by terror and by propaganda and seduction, war that springs up in our midst by disaffection and panic and partizanship. The images of the barricade and the bombing plane, the concentration camp and the Gestapo, the deportation and the pogrom recur. The hideous aspects of fascism are suggested in another passage from the poem of MacLeish quoted above:

the watchers at the corners:  
 The concussions at night: terror by dark: blood in the  
 Paved streets: whips: wounds: welts:  
 Torture with throttled tongue: limbs doubled:—  
 The beast at the back; the tooth at the throat: the telephone  
 Listening after the ring for the ear to listen:  
 The silence at the door behind the bell—<sup>5</sup>

MacLeish's verse plays for radio, *The Fall of the City*, and *Air Raid*, offer different aspects of war today. The former portrays the helplessness of a demoralized city before the dictator. The latter exhibits the inhumanities of indiscriminate bombing.

Auslander's *Riders At the Gate* presents us with an apocalypse of our age in terms of the four horsemen of the *Book of Revelation*. We shall return to this. John Bunker in his volume, *Revolt*, describes the convulsions of the time as a revolt of the masses

4. *Another Time*, New York, Random, 1940, p. 22. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

5. "Discovery of This Time," as above. Reprinted by permission of *Poetry* and the author.

against their masters, a revolt animated by both love and hate, a groping of the peoples after liberation. Here, the people at length speak. And they speak against their leaders of the past. The leaders of business and politics, the writers and scientists, all come in for fierce indictment. Out of the inarticulate masses arises at last a retribution of terrible import.

We must cleanse the earth  
With sorrow and hate. . . .  
But mostly with love,  
Love pitiless, unrelenting, omnipotent,  
Love hungry with a great hunger—  
Love for mankind.<sup>6</sup>

As in Auslander's drama of judgment, the theme of retribution is more clearly stated than the responsibilities are clearly assigned.

For a picture of the refugees of today we may cite part of Auden's "Refugee Blues (German Jews)":

"The consul banged the table and said:  
'If you've got no passport you're officially dead.'  
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;  
Asked me politely to return next year:  
But where shall we go today, my dear, but where shall we go  
today? . . .

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,  
A thousand windows and a thousand doors:  
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of them was ours.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;  
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:  
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and me."<sup>7</sup>

To this can be added the poetry in German language written in this hemisphere by exiles and unfortunately unable to find publication. A few lines will suggest the sense of being both exiled

6. *Revolt*, New York, Campion, 1940, p. 5. By permission.

7. *Another Time*, pp. 85, 86. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.



and betrayed on the part of those loyal to the best hopes of Germany and Austria:

Die Heimat hat mir Treue nicht gehalten,  
sie gab sich ganz den bösen Trieben hin . . .

Doch hier wird niemand meine Verse lesen,  
ist nichts, was meiner Seele Sprache spricht;  
ein deutscher Dichter bin ich einst gewesen  
jetzt ist mein Leben Spuk wie mein Gedicht.<sup>8</sup>

Ernst Toller, the lamented German poet who died by his own hand recently, an exile in this country, expressed the tragedy of the German liberal in his own homeland, in lines from his *Schwalbenbuch*, a few of which we shall translate. The opening stanza greets the constant swallow returning in spring to Germany. Why did she not stay in the Greek isles rather than come to this cold April of the north?

O our springtime  
Is no more the springtime of Hölderling.  
Germany's springtime has become its winter,  
Chilling and murky,  
And naked of love  
To warm you.

You are like the poets, O swallow;  
Afflicted of men, yet they love with unquenchable  
Ardor.

You—more at home with the stars, the cliffs, the storms, than  
with man—

You are like the poets, O swallow.<sup>9</sup>

One may put alongside of this several poems of Robert Nathan on the Jewish exile, with their valiant assurance,

Who has no earth will take his heart for roots.

But not less significant than these more obvious costs of life

8. "Ein deutscher Dichter . . .", by Max Herrmann-Neisse, from *Dichter im Exil*, ed. by Hans Sahl; unpublished. Free rendering: "The homeland has not kept faith with me, / It has abandoned itself to evil impulses. / Here none will read my verses, / Here nothing speaks the language of my soul; / I was once a German poet, / Now is my life a phantom like my poem."

9. *Ibid.*

today are the more subtle blights of spiritual dearth and disarray so closely connected with them. Much havoc is all about us, curiously combined with good. A Patchen who can powerfully protest the waste of youth is yet haunted by phantasms and morbidity; indeed, his last work is built on the thesis that our age dehumanizes its idealists, driving them to the ultimate confines of the irrational and the maudlin. A Jeffers exalts the deep health-giving relations of man with his cosmic environment, and delivers sledge-hammer blows of scorn and loathing for the follies of civilization, but his scorn and loathing are infected with despair and he persists in parodying and falsifying the idea of Christian love. "The rootless spiritual life of our time" appears in other writers, sometimes as incoherence, sometimes as blasphemy, sometimes as traumatic class prejudice. Such facts should make us thoughtful as we undertake a new order. What kind of building materials are at our disposition?

### *Diagnosis*

The causes of these ills are indicated in various ways by the poets. No doubt they are assigned ultimately to the root of evil in man's will—for poets of many persuasions today teach their versions of original sin:

The diamond back of evil in all things . . .  
And still he falls along our earth in rings.<sup>1</sup>

But our modern voices distinguish the areas and institutions in which the evil lodges.

Some poets have recently focussed on the dictators and their parties as the evil geniuses of our time and called to arms against them. It is rare, however, to find such a view divorced from recognition of the basic factors in our society that have produced the immediate crisis. Mr. Auslander writes a "Trumpet to Battle"—not the "local crusade of one nation," but "for hu-

1. Genevieve Taggard, *Collected Poems*, New York, Harper, 1938. By permission.

man-kind wholly," and appeals to Byron to rise again as "the Prince of the oppressed." He satirizes Mussolini, and then Hitler:

Cringest thou from the lash  
Of the little lunatic Thor  
Who spouts and sputters of war  
Under his comic moustache?

The firing squad shall not miss them;  
The top-hatted headsman not fail them;  
The hound and the hoot-owl shall hail them:  
And the axe's tongue tickle and kiss them.<sup>2</sup>

But Auslander's interesting poem presents the dictators on the whole as the nemesis of an unjust age, and the same is true of Bunker's *Revolt*. Indeed, only one political cause has really attracted the passionate allegiance of the poets until recently, and that has been the cause of the Spanish loyalists. It is well known, however, that Miss Millay has used her pen boldly in the defense of the democracies, and Robert Sherwood in his play, *There Shall Be No Night*, espoused the same cause in terms of the heroic stand of the Finns. We may now probably expect to see the poets move with Mr. MacLeish to a recognition that whatever the background of this war, the immediate emergency calls for its own decision.

As regards the diagnosis of the total scene we find the poets chiefly concerned with social wrongs and with the effects of the machine. Whether in England or in America now for the last ten or fifteen years such poets as W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, Horace Gregory, MacLeish, Patchen, Fearing and Miss Rukeyser have not only revealed the wretchedness and tawdriness found about us, but have fixed the responsibilities. These lie in the opportunities for power and privilege left wide open by the industrial revolution and unchecked by political institutions designed for a simpler day. The motives of society as a whole have thereby been directed towards gain

2. *Riders At the Gate*, New York, Macmillan, 1938, pp. 12, 13. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.



and this has been intensified by the development of a new continent at home and the creation of markets abroad. But the particular effects on the winners on the one hand and the losers on the other are separately itemized, as well as the havoc that has resulted for all the higher expressions of society: education, art, taste, manners and not least religion. As MacLeish has said in his *America Was Promises*, speaking of the uncorrupted older tradition:

The Aristocracy of Wealth and Talents  
Turned its talents into wealth and lost them.  
Turned enlightened selfishness to wealth . . .  
Bred out: bred to fools; to hostlers:  
Card sharps: well dressed women: dancefloor doublers.<sup>3</sup>

Bring into the picture now the recent effects of technological advance, particularly the rootless masses of labor dependent as their employers are on uncontrollable cycles of business activity; also the monotony and ugliness of work where it obtains; the severance of multitudes from traditional securities and patterns; and the fascist and vigilante tendencies that show themselves among the more obtuse elements of the winners, and we can begin to understand the revolt of modern poets and their frequently sardonic comments on "democracy." For an example, Miss Marie Welch puts the following in the mouth of the "red-baiter," who is made to protest against the coming of spring because it will upset an advantageous price level: ("The Red-Baiter's Spring"):

Though to restore prosperity to the nation  
We need a period of sane starvation,  
An underground conspiracy's revealed  
That would put grass and grain in every field,  
And flowers and even fruit on every tree,  
By methods foreign to democracy!<sup>4</sup>

No one has diagnosed the ultimate causes of our sorry estate more trenchantly than the well known expatriate poet Ezra

3. New York, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1939, p. 13. By permission.

4. *This Is Our Own*, New York, Macmillan, 1940, p. 64. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

Pound. We regret that for reasons of copyright we may not quote him verbally, but his recurrent thesis is that acquisitiveness is a mortal disease, it reaches to the life. His favorite term for it is the latin "usura," i.e., usury, meaning unearned rent and interest upon which so much of our economic system is based. Usury he says, rusteth the craft and the craftsman, and slays the child in the womb. It is against nature, USURA CONTRA NATURA, as he concludes, with capital letters.

Perhaps the most violent characterization of our civilization is that of Robinson Jeffers, the California poet. An example may be taken from his volume, *Such Counsels You Gave To Me*. The poem is entitled, "The Coast Road." As the steam shovels are at work along the Californian shore, a lone rider gazing down from his farm shakes his fist at the operations. His "good life" is threatened:

At the far end of those loops of road  
Is what will come and destroy it, a rich and vulgar and  
bewildered civilization dying at the core,  
A world that is feverishly preparing new wars, peculiarly  
vicious ones, and heavier tyrannies . . . a strangely  
Missionary world, road-builder, wind-rider, educator, printer  
and picture-maker and broad-caster . . .

I hope the weathered horseman up yonder  
Will die before he knows what this eager world will do to  
his children.<sup>5</sup>

As far as ultimate causes go, however, Jeffers is often inclined to fatalism, and takes gratification in saying,

The ages like blind horses turning a mill tread their  
own hoof-marks. Whose corn's ground in that mill?<sup>6</sup>

Even the great Yeats held a view of historical cycles which as far as it bore on our immediate prospect was equally negative. Like Spengler, he saw the passing in our time of an old cultural order and the beginning of a long epoch of relative barbarism. With him as with many Christian students of culture the immediate causes of our disorder lie in the solvent effects of

5. New York, Random, 1937, pp. 86, 87. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 104. By permission.

rationalism, in science and technology. A group of our American poet-critics including Allen Tate have similarly fixed upon the Philistinism of our culture, relating it particularly to "Yankee commercialism." Its worst feature, however, lies for them in the disintegration of our spiritual life which deprives us of resources to meet the dubious tomorrow.

The dangers resulting from technological advance are indicated more specifically and more plausibly than in Jeffers' poem on the coast road. A striking poem of some length that appeared in the English *Christendom*, "Ultimatum Expires Midnight," presents the dilemma of man, with his new inventions prostituted to war. The poem in its entirety is presented at the close. By a tour de force the poet portrays a delegation of mortals before the throne of God, ashamed of their skill, with particular reference to the bombing plane exhibited in that exalted station.

Take away the skill from our fingers,  
The fire in the mind,  
The drive of the will,  
The craft, the talent, the genius, the Gift  
That issues in such devilry.  
Make us simple and ignorant again,  
Helpless children bound forever  
To struggle for daily bread;  
Keeping the wild beasts from the hearth fires,  
Watching our flocks. . . .

I can't do that, said the Father patiently.  
You can't carry on that struggle  
For fire and food and shelter  
*Without* the skill, the talent, the genius, the Gift  
Which you are begging to be allowed  
To throw back in My face.  
. . . There are the animals, of course;  
But I do not choose that you should be animals.<sup>7</sup>

As is evident in this poem, the question of causes for our present ills leads back finally to moral issues, and so it is with the vast majority of our poets.

7. M. Farrow, in *Christendom*, Oxford, England, September 1939. By permission.



### *The Way Forward*

Recognition of the ills and trends we have indicated has led to a mood of misgiving not to say repentance in many writers. This mood has gathered head among us to an exceptional degree, and notably among the secularized groups among us where it might not be expected. We have evidence of a new scrutiny of values, a recognition of personal impoverishment and bondage, eyes open to disastrous courses, a return to old wells of faith that have long been choked with earth, and a call to mobilization of our ultimate resources.

A deep note of abhorrence and hunger issuing from the masses is expressed in the following lines of Kenneth Patchen, all the more significant as coming from a poet of the extreme left:

*We must learn to live for the first time. Murder is in the heart of everyone who has ever lived. It must be taken out: Our images must be destroyed . . . tales of death and destruction . . . weed it all out . . . accounts of war and conquest . . . all of it must go. We have no use for that kind of history . . . Tell me how the birds build their nests . . . Tell me what the farmer sings at his plow.<sup>1</sup>*

In Hagedorn's phrase, "we have a need of bonfires." For one thing the pretensions and tyranny of positivist science must be dethroned. It has sterilized our life of faith and of all the subtler apprehensions and intuitions by which men live. "The immorality of science" is a phrase used by Prof. Nels Ferré which indicates our revulsion not against the true scientific spirit but against science masquerading as philosophy. Auslander has neatly allegorized the swing back from positivism to the sense of mystery in life in his poem, "The Waterbusters." The Indians that want the soul-refreshing rain appeal to their medicine men. Though this is superstition, yet it may teach us

---

1. *Journal of Albion Moonlight*, awaiting publication. By permission of the author.

to look elsewhere than to charts and graphs for deliverance from the blinding dust that chokes our spirits.

Give the Waterbusters back  
What turned their fathers' blue skies black,  
Bruised the cloud and made it crack.  
Give them their Thunderbird again,  
Their Sacred Bundle big with rain.  
Soon or late Science must  
Bow before the blinding dust,  
Fold its desks and close its doors,  
Yield to Faith the desert floors,  
Superstition's ancient chores  
Of letting loose the heavy rain,  
Of hanging tassels on the grain,  
Of bringing bread out of pain.  
When human cheeks and hopes grow hollow,  
When drouth bleaches corn and cattle,  
Let the Waterbusters bellow,  
Let the Sacred Bundle rattle.  
While professors ponder charts  
Let the rain revive men's hearts.<sup>2</sup>

Again, the hazards of technological advance apart from social control are recognized by the poets. Since D. H. Lawrence, the spiritual costs of the machine have been stressed. In its larger aspects the question would lead us far afield into the whole question of the ravage of ancient and wholesome social patterns and the temptation to gain and to inhumanity that accompany industrial civilization. This we have alluded to. But we would emphasize here rather the particular menace of the airplane. This is the theme of the poem, "Ultimatum Expires Midnight," from which we have already quoted. The delegation of men that approaches the throne of God petitions him to remove from man the skill to make such things:

2. *Riders At the Gate*, 1938, p. 72. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

It kills women, said the men roughly.  
 It kills children, said the women harshly;  
 Kills them, blasts them to splinters out of Your sky  
 While they are running to our arms.  
 Leaves them like smashed dolls,  
 In cold rows on the pavement—

No consideration has given such pause to the over-confidence of our age as the capacity for destruction of modern weapons. This danger together with the growth of crime and neurosis have obliged the unthinking to consider anew the need of religious disciplines in society.

The present mood of humility at its deepest level can be illustrated by the most recent work of T. S. Eliot. In his poem, "East Coker" we are taught the lesson of relinquishment and impoverishment. We must empty and disavow ourselves if we would truly possess ourselves and our world again:

In order to arrive at what you do not know  
 You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.  
 In order to possess what you do not possess  
 You must go by the way of dispossession.  
 In order to arrive at what you are not  
 You must go through the way in which you are not.<sup>3</sup>

Auden has put it, as it were, in geometrical formulae:

Every eye must weep alone  
 Till *I Will* be overthrown . . .  
*I Am* become *I Love*,  
*I Have Not I am Loved*.<sup>4</sup>

Revulsion from fatal courses passes naturally into exploration of a better order, and queries as to the resources available for such amendment. The poets do not agree in these matters any more than others. There are those that see the hope of the future in terms of authoritative institutions, the Catholics and Anglo-Catholics, like Eliot himself who has even spoken for royalism

3. New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1940, p. 12. By permission.

4. *Another Time*, Dedicatory Poem. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.



in politics. Yeats, whether he approved it or not, saw the oncoming of an age of Caesars. Ezra Pound has given some excuse for being called a fascist, at least a theoretical fascist.

Until recently the most effective affirmation of a social program has been that of the Marxist poets. Both in this country and in England since the early thirties the most vigorous younger poets have found a cause productive of passionate utterance and aspiration in the idea of social revolution. The outlook and affiliation of these writers has evolved as a result of disenchantment with Soviet Russia and for other reasons, but they and their younger disciples are still speaking powerfully for justice and fraternity, if not for liberty. Mr. Selden Rodman has presented the situation as follows:<sup>5</sup> The Marxist movement in poetry had the merit of widening the field of the poet's interest. It tended, however, to be intolerant and doctrinaire. Gradually the poets concerned with society have come to speak in terms of social democracy rather than of communism. Democracy, they say, must be made meaningful for all of us. On what tradition, then, can such poets build? On the tradition of Jefferson and Lincoln, says Rodman, on the optimism of Whitman and the humility of Sandburg. It must conserve the Marxist emphasis on the sacredness of labor and renew the revolutionary core of Christianity. The poet must speak with clarity and he must speak out of a first hand knowledge of the life of men and at some point have an active part in it.

Put beside this the view affirmed repeatedly by Archibald MacLeish in his poetry and his verse plays for radio and in his addresses. The poet, he says, must be a responsible citizen. He must use a public and not a private speech. He must be conversant with the issues and choices of his generation. "What a people can become is the accomplishment in act of what a people can conceive. What the people of a nation can conceive

5. "Poetry and Democracy," *Sat. Rev. Lit.*, August 10, 1940, p. 14.

is what their artists and their poets can make actual to them and thus possible."<sup>6</sup> Mr. MacLeish is particularly concerned with the spiritual mobilization of democracy today for its test against fascism. One may wonder whether he draws the lines of conflict deeply enough, but his view of the poet's task is instructive.

One could make a good sized anthology of the poems recently written that deal with the American hope and the American tradition. These poets are not writing patriotic jingles. As Kenneth Allott has said,

The small boy finds his jerseys small for him:  
and we have outgrown our patriotic fauna  
with their St. Vitus behavior.<sup>7</sup>

It is the theme of the best of them that this nation is still only in an early stage of its achievement of an ordered liberty. "The American people is a very young people indeed:—about as old, perhaps, as the English people was in the reign of King John when oligarchy was in its infancy. The picture of England between 1066 and 1215 was no more and no less inspiring than the picture of America between 1776 and 1941. You are at present chiefly occupied upon destroying the old oligarchic system, just as the English were occupied in 1215 in destroying the Norman-French despotic system. Before you lies the future with the positive task of creating democracy."<sup>8</sup>

Our poets recognize what a long and costly initiation the country must go through. They realize at what a cost America will fulfil its promises. They are clairvoyant as to the inchoate character of our present society, how weak it is with its undisciplined appetites and its immanent conflicts. Such an analysis as we have here made is indicated in the work of the young poet Muriel Rukeyser. Her poem, "The Soul and Body of John Brown," is an attempt to portray the long ordeal of democracy

---

6. *The American Cause*, New York, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941, p. 39.

7. *New Verse*, no. 25 (May 1937), p. 11.

8. Rushton Coulborn, "The American Culture: Polity," *Kenyon Review*, Spring 1941, p. 156.

and to offer a symbol for the invincible urge to liberty that works in it. She affixes to the poem the words of Joel, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!" John Brown after his execution takes on mythical proportions to haunt and scourge the nation as a voice for liberty: "a streaming meteor in the blackened air—a fanatic beacon of fierceness." Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones is also used to suggest a nation awaiting resurrection. Employing the allusive methods of modern verse, Miss Rukeyser suggests the judgments that fall upon those nations that stifle freedom:

The trial of heroes follows their execution. The striding  
wind of nations with new rain, new lightning,  
destroyed in magnificent noon shining straight down  
the fiery pines. Brown wanted freedom. Could not himself  
be free

until more grace reached a corroded world. Our guilt his own.<sup>9</sup>

In her poem "The World of Tomorrow," Babette Deutsch, apropos of the motto of the recent World's Fair, contrasts the America of alabaster with the America of plaster:

They speak of tomorrow, building alabaster  
Towers, but in the brief splendor of plaster . . .  
Tomorrow will come, naturally, like death . . .  
Oh, it will come more quietly than a bud from its sheath.  
It was prepared before and after the Flood,  
In Egypt and in Rome . . .  
But tomorrow is not in the hands of a man or a nation,  
Though it has been shaped by Moscow and Madrid,  
And all that we left undone and all that we did,  
The late sleep, the paid kiss, the hands in the golden basin.  
This is not quite what they mean, these gentlemen  
Planning the Fair, eager to promote trade,  
Make friends, make money, make what can be made,  
Mapping a new world with a streamlined pen.  
They are deceived; we know it otherwise . . .  
The impresario is unimpressed  
Delighting in his triangle and sphere,

9. *Poetry*, *A Magazine of Verse*, June 1940. By permission of the author.

Blocks of a nursery world he can build here  
 To cheer the mob who all hope for the best,  
 And think of the future as something on which to borrow,  
 Not as the glory for which the world was made . . . <sup>10</sup>

Allen Tate in "The Mediterranean" and in "Aeneas in Washington" pictures the whole American quest in terms of Aeneas' search for the site where he should found his new city, the Rome to be, a quest not yet completed. MacLeish's survey of the successive phases of the American promise from the voyage of Columbus down to the present time, "America Was Promises," is a tale of repeated frustration, and yet always offering new hopes. "Never were there promises as now," but it is imperative that today they be grasped. John Ciardi in his recent first volume, writes a moving letter to his immigrant mother. She found *her* America; despite steerage and slums it was "all good." But he in a later decade can promise her nothing:

There is no hailing yet of the hoped-for land.  
 Only the enormous, wheeling, imperative sea,  
 And the high example of the earlier coming—<sup>11</sup>

In the poem "Continent's Edge," he reflects that with the western sea reached adventure must turn inward.

Genevieve Taggard likewise notes where advance can come:

These triumphant hills have stood  
 Waiting for human magnitude;  
 They have seen  
 Only the humble and the mean . . .  
 Awkward women weeding rows;  
 Children brandishing at crows,  
 Men building barns, men cutting wood  
 In cankered solitude.<sup>12</sup>

10. *One Part Love*, New York, Oxford, 1939, pp. 31, 32. By permission.

11. *Homeward to America*, New York, Holt, 1940, p. 3. By permission.

12. *Collected Poems*, 1918-1939, New York, Harper, p. 81. By permission of the publisher.



And Wilbert Snow in his *Main Tides* writes of the granite as symbolic of America. It holds water-pockets that can be made to flow as by Moses' rod, and blocks of it lie sufficient to "re-build the temple of our land." His "One Hundred Percent American" invites those that turn back from the road to Moscow and Rome to find him at home,

Pondering a new road  
By the slope of a Western sea  
That ends where man may bide his span  
In glorious anarchy.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Christian Affirmation*

In hours when our noblest causes appear to be in jeopardy it is well to return to Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. In the closing comment of the chorus on the astounding vindication of Israel by God's frail servant, the blind Samson, we find the lines:

Oft he seems to hide his face,  
But unexpectedly returns,  
And to his faithful champion hath in place  
Bore witness gloriously; whence Gaza mourns,  
And all that band them to resist  
His uncontrollable intent.

This promise was recalled to me by a friend at the moment when the decision of the battle of France hung in the balance. He was hoping for a sudden reversal of the fortunes of war like that which took place at the Battle of the Marne in 1914. God would "unexpectedly return" and show his face again.

France was soon prostrate, however, and that application of the lines of Milton was disallowed. But in a larger sense than military victory the hope in Milton's lines is warranted. Milton saw the cause of the puritans, the Commonwealth of Saints, overthrown, and put his trust in a larger hope. It is true that we may yet see actual events in the public or military area which

13. New York, Holt, 1940. By permission.

will appear to lovers of freedom like a fulfilment of Milton's vision. Many Christians today, indeed, will be unwilling to recognize the hand of God in deliverance wrought by the sword. In any case they must ultimately attribute to God that better day which must surely emerge from this area of tragedy. The confidence that it will emerge is the theme of the following poem, "This Day."

This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of  
contumely: for the children are come to the birth,  
and there is no strength to bring forth.           Is. 37:3

Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring  
forth? saith the Lord.                               Is. 66:9

As though our world had never seen the bud  
Of patience burst in miracle of bloom,  
As though our race had never seen a flood  
Of sudden grace shed glory in the gloom;

As though no self-same testimony ran  
From clan to empire and from clime to clime:  
"The inscrutable gods pursue their cryptic plan,  
An unthought fabric pays the cost of time;

Some undreamed crystal marks the ancient throes,  
Some breathless temple stands above the tide,  
Some arch of peace atones a myriad woes,  
Some coral ridge stands when the seas subside."

O wait upon the ancient miracle  
Ever renewed; discount the eternal boon,  
Feel through these years some tide of purpose swell,  
Otherwise great, now in the world's mid-noon.

These infinite tasks are portents of a Work  
Afoot among us toward transcendent ends;  
Behind these ruins and these hungers lurk,  
Strategies unsurmised and secret trends;



Such passages and the theme of Muriel Rukeyser cited above give point to a remark of Lewis Mumford, that Protestantism and Christianity have been characterized by "inability to recognize as religious those contemporary manifestations of religion that take other than the old familiar forms."

This is illustrated by Ezra Pound. Few have pointed out as well as he has the drought of spiritual life in modern society. In our dusty, dismal Philistine world, he says, we have no faith, no ritual, no imagination. We are so conditioned to the practical and the prosaic that we cannot put ourselves in the place of those who had visions of Christ, or those who saw the earth tenanted with fauns and dryads. All the sacrament we have is the "press" and the only sublime ritual is the ballot box. Reflection on this indictment by a lay preacher might well point us the way to sources of power in a time of crisis. The recovery of ritual has been one of the chief concerns of the modern poets since the publication of *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot.

In his most recent work, "East Coker,"<sup>5</sup> Eliot writes out of the acute stage of the world's sickness, not merely out of the preparatory stage. This poem is written out of an England and a Europe in the inferno of total war. In this situation the poet, who now speaks as a Christian seer, has only one counsel and that is repentance. In a sense he is speaking for all of us, for the "multitudes in the valley of decision," the multitudes of our modern world who have found that the worship of false gods has led to disaster and chaos. Let us learn all we can, he says, from our ordeal. Our loss may be our hope. He puts the paradox this way,

Our only health is the disease.

Indeed,

to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.

When we have come to see how great is our disease, then only shall we be in the frame of mind to receive healing. Then only shall we turn from the false values that have brought on our

---

5. Harcourt Brace, 1940.



disorder. Then only shall we cease from spending our money for that which is not bread, and our labor for that which satisfieth not. Then we shall know, as Eliot writes, evoking the cross and the eucharist with startling boldness—then we shall know

The dripping blood our only drink,  
The bloody flesh our only food.

So through the agony of this age and the age to come,  
We must be still and still moving  
Into another intensity  
For a further union, a deeper communion  
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation.<sup>6</sup>

For the Christian the only ultimate solution lies in Christ. Our part is to open the door for him into our world. We can but call upon him to "blaze in our hearts" as James Agee does in his poem, "A Chorale":<sup>7</sup>

Great God kind God the deep fire-headed fountain  
Of earth and funneled hell and hopeful mountain:  
Of ghosted Gods the eversame survivor:  
Of shoreless strength, of peace the prime contriver:  
If this your Son is now indeed debaséd  
Among old effigies of Gods effacéd,  
Blaze in our hearts who still on earth commend you:  
Who through all desolation will defend you:  
For we are blinded all and steep are swervéd  
Far among many Deaths who still would be preservéd.

We shall not close on the note of petition, but on the note of promise of what God can do with us and through us if we allow him. This is the theme of a little poem of Kagawa in his *Songs From the Slums*, a poem called "Discovery." In a mood such as we all have these days, a mood in which we are conscious of how helpless and useless we are, Kagawa was suddenly struck with the thought, that after all, if we turn our lives over to God, there is no telling what things he may bring to pass with them. For then *he* becomes the agent and not we ourselves.

6. Pp. 13-15. Quoted by permission of Harcourt, Brace and Company, publisher.

7. *Permit Me Voyage*, New Haven, Yale, 1934, p. 37. Quoted by permission.

I cannot invent  
New things,  
Like the airships  
Which sail  
On silver wings;  
But today  
A wonderful thought  
In the dawn was given,  
And the stripes on my robe,  
Shining from wear,  
Were suddenly fair,  
Bright with a light  
Falling from Heaven—  
Gold, and silver, and bronze  
Lights from the windows of Heaven.

And the thought  
Was this:  
That a secret plan  
Is hid in my hand;  
That my hand is big,  
Big,  
Because of this plan.

That God,  
Who dwells in my hand,  
Knows this secret plan  
Of the things He will do for the world  
Using my hand!<sup>8</sup>

Does not this "discovery" point us to the "sources of power" in a time of crisis? As a wise Christian once said, "All the mysteries of the divine purpose are hidden away in that one word, Obey!"

---

The author and the editor wish to express their appreciation to the publishers and holders of copyright who have granted permission for the quotations of poetry used in *Voices of Our Day*. Particular acknowledgments are made in each case in the text itself.

8. From *Songs From The Slums*, Toyohiko Kagawa. Copyright 1935. Used by permission of Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.

# ULTIMATUM EXPIRES MIDNIGHT<sup>1</sup>

By M. FARROW

THE wingéd squadrons of the sky  
Look down with bright and eager eye  
To see the sprawling city loom,  
An easy target, through the gloom:  
While up above, at Heaven's gates  
A trembling deputation waits  
To see if something can't be done  
About the War that's just begun.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mankind, said Michael,  
Has sent a deputation  
Re War;  
Isn't that *your* province?  
Asked The Father,  
With a twinkle;  
I only wish it were, sighed the Warrior;  
*I'd* teach 'em how to fight clean—  
*And* what to fight for!  
This modern carnage  
Faugh! No, My Lord,  
I beg to be excused.

You're quite right,  
Nodded the All Just.  
This kind of thing  
Bears no relation to your sort of battle.  
Well, I suppose we'd better see them—  
And, look here, Michael,  
Let's try to thrash this War question out with them  
Once for all.

There were a dozen of them, all told.  
Two mothers, one of grown sons,

1. Reprinted from the September, 1939, issue of *Christendom*, published by Basil Blackwell, Oxford, England. It was separately reprinted by the Pax House, London. The author is a young writer, a member of the parish of St. Patrick's Church, Edgbaston, Birmingham. We reprint the poem here by the kind permission of and by arrangement with the editor of *Christendom*, Maurice B. Reckitt.

One of small children;  
 A nun, a workman, a philanthropist  
 (Looking a little askance at the Religious),  
 A doctor, an Archbishop (whose eye,  
 Generally downcast, tried in snatches  
 To gather in Heaven's ecclesiastical arrangements),  
 A poet, a farmer—oh, and of course a statesman—  
 A banker, too, and a philosopher.  
 Before the flame that shone from the Throne  
 They shrank a little,  
 And stood closer for company,  
 Though still remaining  
 Each in his congenial group.

Well, what is it? said the Father, gently;  
 So gently that the drooping heads  
 Came up as one.  
 Having wasted no time in discussing orders of precedence  
 But rushed to the Throne the moment they heard  
 'Ultimatum'  
 They had had no chance to rehearse  
 What they should say or in what order they should speak.  
 The result was Babel.

For my sons' sake, and all the others like them!  
 My little children, and all little children;  
 The women suffer so!  
 I have just built a fine new health centre;  
 The Crops will rot for lack of harvesting;  
 We are helpless—medicine and surgery  
 Are prostituted when we simply patch men up  
 To go back and be blown to smaller pieces;  
 For the sake of financial stability;  
 Because the poets suffer worst of all;  
 Because that's no work for a decent man to do;  
 Because we have left no stone unturned;  
 Because it will mean the end of culture—

In unison:

GOOD LORD, DELIVER US!

Quietly now, said the All Patient;  
 There are two things you must make clear



Before I can do anything to help you.  
First of all—  
Why have you come to Me  
Instead of to the Prince, your Elder Brother,  
When you have been expressly told  
To make all your petitions  
In His Name?

The delegation winced at this.  
Mutterings were heard,  
Glum and unintelligible.  
Whereat Michael called  
Speak up, please!  
The All-Knowing has asked a question!  
Someone must answer.  
There was a jostling in the little throng,  
And after a moment's confusion  
The statesman stepped forward and bowed.

Almighty, he began judicially  
(With the air and confidence of a practised speaker  
Never yet caught out by an awkward question)  
It is true that it has been a pious custom  
For many years to ask favours  
In His Highness' Name;  
But, frankly,

We have reached a pass at which  
Tradition and custom, we feel  
Should give place to expediency.  
The fact is . . . . .  
Some of us are by no means sure  
That the Prince of Peace can really help us now.

Michael's armour clanged  
With a terrifying and long-drawn echo  
Through the courts  
As he drew himself sharply to attention,  
And his hand sought the hilt of his sword.  
The All-Seeing shook his head  
Very slightly at the outraged Archangel  
And the fire round Michael's head  
Cooled back from purple to clear gold.

Then the Supreme Disposer bowed to the statesman,  
Dismissing him, and turned instead  
To the Nun and the Archbishop, asking  
What have *you* to say about that?

His Grace had turned a shocked look on the statesman,  
But now that he faced the Throne  
His wrath fell from him  
And he said with a decent humility:  
I pray our dear sister to answer that;  
High office cannot speak for the commonalty;  
Only the dedicated heart  
Knows truly its brother's heart.

The Nun spoke quietly.  
Heavenly Father, she said,  
I think the truth is, we are too ashamed  
To approach Prince Jesus in this matter.  
He gave us the command  
That should have stopped war years ago;  
How can we go to Him and say  
Save us again from our sins?  
No, we do not now  
Invoke Your all-merciful pity,  
Nor dare we beg for grace  
To turn from our evil ways—  
We have had every chance to do that,  
As You, Goodness, know.  
We ask, in the sore strait to which sin and skill have brought us,  
Your direct intervention.  
In spite of our free and maldirected wills,  
Save us against ourselves and in spite of ourselves.

The delegation dropped as one man to its knees,  
Begging  
Save us against ourselves and in spite of ourselves!

One moment, said the Father of Lights,  
You haven't answered My second question yet.  
What is it you are so afraid of?

Michael, here, has been waging war  
Almost ever since I created him.  
He doesn't find it a shameful occupation;  
He has never begged me to let him off.  
You have had some good fighters yourselves, too.  
What about young David the Shepherd,  
Martin of Tours, Joan the Maid,  
And George of Macedonia?  
Good soldiers, all of them.  
In other days you used to ask Me  
To help you win your battles  
(Yes, it was tiresome enough at times  
With both sides at it!)  
Why have you changed your tune?

At this the women answered with one voice,  
It is the bombers.  
And they shuddered, there at the Throne's foot.

War isn't what it was  
Said the workman suddenly,  
Almost as though speaking to himself.  
I like a bit of good machinery;  
There's plant down there at this moment, Lord,  
Would almost surprise You with its cleverness;  
Lovely stuff, running as true in its bearings  
As Your worlds spin round their suns,  
Or very near.  
But the devil of it is—if You'll excuse me—  
That the war machines themselves  
Have taken skill out of the fighting man's hands  
And the use out of his wits  
And the pluck out of his heart,  
For they do their dirty work chiefly  
On women and children, not on the enemy's soldiers.  
A man's only got to be a good machine-minder;  
It's no job for a self-respecting chap  
Or a man with craft in his fingers,  
Or a fellow with the guts of a soldier.  
For all the skill we put into making them,  
The machines have made of war  
A hit-and-miss affair,  
Clumsy, dirty and indiscriminate.

Yes, said the Creator, turning to him;  
You have put your finger on the trouble  
As a good mechanic should.  
Michael, get a squadron of Powers  
To bring a bomber up here.

\* \* \* \* \*

Beautiful, said the Maker of All when He saw it  
Poised on the crystal floor  
Sleek and in fighting trim.  
You are learning to make flying things  
After My own pattern.  
Your first attempts were extraordinarily clumsy,  
But your machines have got better and better  
As you have learnt the arts I taught the sparrows and eagles  
On the Fifth Day.  
Beautiful!

But the mothers had turned their heads away,  
As though to shut out the sight of it,  
Until a rout of Cherubins flew up  
To take a look.  
Whereat both women instantly  
Stretched out arresting arms  
To bar the children  
From the evil thing.

Now, tell me, said the All-Knowing, gently,  
How you use this thing you have made so cleverly.

There was a long, shamed pause.  
Then the statesman cleared his throat and spoke;  
It flies over enemy territory, he said,  
And discharges its missiles in such a fashion  
As to destroy as completely as possible  
The enemy's ammunition reserves,  
His military centres, and his transport.

Well and good, said the All-Father;  
That is perhaps a fair objective,  
If you *must* fight and destroy.



Is that all?

No, said the poet, and the word was wrung from him;  
No, said the workman, grim and unflinching;  
No, said the Archbishop, with heavy sorrow.  
No, said the farmer and the doctor bluntly.  
You know it is not, they finished in chorus.

Tell me, insisted the Lord of Hosts,  
Bending the sword of His glance full on them.

It kills women, said the men roughly.  
It kills children, said the women harshly;  
Kills them, blasts them to splinters out of Your sky  
While they are running to our arms.  
Leaves them like smashed dolls,  
In cold rows on the pavement—  
Yes, I have seen, said the Maker,  
I have seen. What do you want Me to do?

Take away the skill from our fingers,  
The fire in the mind,  
The drive of the will,  
The craft, the talent, the genius, the Gift  
That issues in such devilry.  
Make us simple and ignorant again,  
Helpless children bound for ever  
To struggle for daily bread;  
Keeping the wild beasts from the hearth fires,  
Watching our flocks,  
Living from hand to mouth,  
From day to day,  
From birth to death  
On daily dole of the bare means of existence.

I can't do that, said the Father patiently.  
You can't carry on that struggle  
For fire and food and shelter,  
*Without* the skill, the talent, the genius, the Gift  
Which you are begging to be allowed  
To throw back in My face.

. . . . . There are the animals, of course;  
But I do not choose that you should be animals;  
As physical organisms you are not particularly suited  
To existence on the purely animal plane.

Lions are stronger,  
 Leopards are swifter,  
 Birds more mobile,  
 Turtles better armoured—  
 If you deplore My creation  
 And the image wherein you are made,  
 There is one choice open to you,  
 And only one.

You must ask Me of your own free wills  
 To uncreate you.

*(Oh my people  
 What have I done unto thee  
 Or wherein have I wearied thee?  
 Answer Me!)*

I Who am Love  
 Made you out of Love,  
 My Belovéd died for you,  
 My Spirit sustains you.  
 Do you, or do you not,  
 Want to go on?

Burdened with gifts  
 That cry to be used,  
 With treasure of talents  
 Yours for the asking,  
 With the deep, inalienable joy  
 Of skill at your finger-ends

*(What could I have done for thee  
 That I have not done?)*

With genius to make you masters of matter,  
 Movers of mountains,  
 Harnessers of tides,  
 With the whole rich world to play with?  
 If you *will* use your powers  
 To blaspheme children out of life  
 I will not stop you  
 (I can look after the children!)  
 If I take away your wills

I shall be left with a world on My hands  
Which can never come to that End  
For which I designed it.  
I have given you the job  
Of building the New Jerusalem there;  
If you refuse it,  
The world is so much rubbish  
Cluttering up My ordered universe.  
For the last time, I put it to you:  
Do you, or do you not,  
Want to go on?

Once more the deputation fell on its knees,  
And this time there was no splitting off into groups.  
Indiscriminate, brotherly, terrified,  
Looking over the brink of the Ultimatum,  
Hand in hand they knit spontaneously,  
Presenting a solid assault of petition—  
LET US GO ON!

Good, said the Father, nodding to Michael.  
Get up and go your ways;  
It is up to you now, you see;  
You yourselves can stop the war  
The very moment you really want to.  
By the terms of My Covenant  
I cannot and I will not interfere.

The group withdrew, and the Eternal  
Turned wearily to His archangel.  
You opened their eyes a bit then, I fancy, My Lord,  
Said the Warrior.  
Yes, a little perhaps—as much as they could bear,  
Being so enamoured of their darkness . . . . .  
My little children, murmured the Father, sighing,  
My little children . . . . .

Michael! Did He smile?

*(Lighten our darkness,  
We beseech Thee, O Lord.)*

## LEST WE FORGET

The following are verbatim quotations from letters of the Rev. A. Burns Chalmers to his wife. Last July the American Friends Service Committee asked Mr. Chalmers to give a year of service in unoccupied France. Smith College, where he is professor and director of Religion, granted him sabbatical leave, and he took the Dixie Clipper for Lisbon on August 4, 1940.

*Marseille, October 22, 1940:* The work keeps on at a very good clip. In the course of a day I see so much perplexity—so many individuals seem to be saying even though they do not put it into words, "Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow."

*November 17, 1940:* It is difficult to give any particularly vivid account of our day by day work. It is not dramatic; I hope it is solid and essential. There are certain divisions:

*Colonies* for children. There are something like 17 of these colonies in which children, mainly French, some Spanish, are cared for and live.

*Feeding.* Here there is great diversity. It includes the 3,000 meals a day in Toulouse, canteens in Montauban and Auch, and the two feeding projects here in Marseille. Added to that is a good supply of vitamins in condensed form for children. Milk in condensed or powdered form is one of the things we give out most. We get it mainly in Switzerland. Probably 200 tons is the amount to date that has been distributed.

Our *Cooperative Club* in Marseille houses about 50 women who are in need of one kind or another. Dr. Strongman heads it up. Here too we distribute clothes for the winter, of which we have only limited supplies.

*Work in the camps\** is another aspect. Something new may be on the point of being worked out. It may include visitation,

---

\*When the word *camps* is used it refers to the concentration camps in unoccupied France where so many refugees are now interned.

clothing, games, cultural work, advice, and help on papers and other types of work.

*Counseling.* This is not necessarily an accurate and satisfactory name for the department I have been heading up for almost four months. We receive sometimes as many as a hundred people a day and try to be constructive and helpful in dealing with a large variety of questions presented.

All of life everywhere is against a backdrop of suspense and apprehension. It is all unpredictable, and one has to be concerned about the larger scene and at the same time make progress with the business at hand.

*December 28, 1940:* After breakfast, we left at 9 for Camp de Gurs. The camp is on top of an open windswept plateau. The entrance is like any camp, CCC or otherwise. The executive offices were long, low, cheaply constructed of wood. We were received by the director, a short pleasant friendly Alsatian. We told of 7 tons of food plus clothing which we had brought. He was cordial, and we talked over its distribution and general conditions in the camp. He conducted us into the camp itself to see some of the kitchens. We passed the main hospital on our right and came to the living quarters of the campers. Two new elements impressed us here: barbed wire and mud. The wire had been there since earlier days when it was originally a camp for Spaniards; the mud is omnipresent and inescapable. Altogether there are about 14,000 people in the camp of all nationalities—Germans, Austrians, Spanish, etc. There are 13 ilots, each having 20 barracks. Each ilot has a chief selected by the internés and much respected. There are 8 ilots for men and 4 or 5 for women. The director took us into ilot A, the first one we came to. We examined the simple outdoor kitchen, which consists of 4 or 5 large tureens in which the soup is prepared. Then going through the mud we visited the ilot infirmary in which there were 30 or 50 beds, all full, and two barracks.

We had two long conferences with the doctors about the use



of our supplementary food and 66,000 francs worth of warm clothing which we have stored in a dry barrack under lock and key but which will be distributed tomorrow. In the afternoon we went to a children's play given in ilot M. The jolly faces of the children provided a bright spot. The chief of ilot M, a women's ilot, is very charming. They are certainly superior, undaunted people here. The equipment is inadequate, but authorities and internés show spirit and ingenuity.

*January 1, 1941:* Today is New Year's Day. How fervently I hope that the year ahead will be one which will bring a real turn toward justice and happiness and love for the world.

*January 7, 1941:* We took the train to Montauban to see our center and work there. C met us at the train, and we saw a school run by the Quakers, a centre d'accueil housing 120 Spaniards, a workshop where artificial limbs are made by the mutilés themselves, and a canteen where 800 are fed each meal, in addition to going to the office. A sizable work.

*January 12, 1941:* I am keeping in touch with United States press opinion, having just read *News Week* for December 16. Naturally we are much encouraged by the planned sailing of the *Cold Harbor* with supplies from New York.

*January 18, 1941:* Perhaps we will see more clearly in the future, but more obscurity may come first. The costs either way will be great. In the meantime, there are human lives all around us, which is a need that can be met. There is mutual idealism and hope that can be shared. There are thrusts out toward a new and better world which must always be encouraged. Day by day I seem to go forward upheld by a groundswell of assurance in the purpose of God.

(Due to the zeal of both French and British censors, it has been impossible for Mr. Chalmers to write very specifically.)



